

Comparing Major Theoretical Perspectives

Structural-Functionalist

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| View of Society | Stable, well-integrated |
| Level of analysis emphasized | Macro |
| Key concepts | Manifest functions Latent functions Dysfunction |
| View of the individual | People are socialized to perform societal functions |
| View of the social order | Maintained through cooperation & consensus |
| View of social change | Predictable, reinforcing |
| Example | Public punishments reinforce the social order |
| View of Society | Society is a system of integrated parts that is relatively stable. Each part works to keep society operating in an orderly way. Members generally agree about what is morally right and morally wrong |
| Core Questions asked by the approach | How is society held together? What are the major parts of society? How are these parts linked? What does each part do to help society work? |

Social Conflict**Feminist Social-Conflict theory**

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| View of Society | Characterized by tension & struggle between groups | Characterized by gender & inequality; causes & solutions vary |
| Level of analysis emphasized | Macro | Both macro & micro levels of analysis |
| Key concepts | Inequality Capitalism Stratification | Standpoint of women Political action Gender inequality Oppression |
| View of the individual | People are shaped by power, coercion, & authority | Differs according to social class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, & physical ability |
| View of the social order | Maintained through force & coercion | Maintained through standpoints that do not include those of women |
| View of social change | Change takes place all the time & may have positive consequences | Essential in order to bring about equality |
| Example | Laws reinforce the positions of those in power | Spousal violence, date rape, & economic equality need to be eliminated |
| View of Society | Society is a system of social inequalities based on class, gender and gender-conflict, and race. Society operates to benefit some categories of people and to harm others. Social inequity causes conflict that leads to social change | |
| Core Questions asked by the approach | How does society divide a population according to class, gender, race, and age? How do advantaged people protect their privileges? How do disadvantaged people challenge the system seeking change? | |

Interactionist

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| View of Society | Active in influencing & affecting everyday social interaction |
| Level of analysis emphasized | Micro analysis as a way of understanding the larger macro phenomena |
| Key concepts | Symbols Nonverbal communication Face to face |
| View of the individual | People manipulate symbols & create their social worlds through interaction |
| View of the social order | Maintained by shared understanding of everyday behavior |
| View of social change | Reflected in people's social positions & their communications with others |
| Example | People respect laws or disobey them based on their own past experience |
| View of Society | Society is an ongoing process. People interact in countless settings using symbolic communications. The reality people experience is variable and changing. |
| Core Questions asked by the approach | How do people experience society? How do people shape the reality they experience? How do behavior and meaning change from person to person and from one situation to another? |